



State Journal-Register/Bill Hagen

Mike Markovich, manager of Springfield's new Venture store, removes the crowd control rope after ribbon cutting ceremonies at the store early Monday.

Venture store opening turned into adventure

by Doug Weaver

So much for a "quiet opening."

Venture, the store that Springfield's been reading and hearing about for months now, tried to open unobtrusively Monday. It was to be a "quiet opening," in the words of the marketing staff. The idea was to let the employees settle into their jobs without having to deal with hordes of shoppers.

It was not to be.

"My employees just got back from lunch, and they had to park blocks away," marveled Jane Randolph, manager of Colonel Day's Levi's Emporium, the Venture sister store next door. Colonel Day's also opened Monday. "They're parking along the streets, back by the automotive shop, behind the store. I wasn't expecting this."

"It's loaded," commented Mike Markovich, Venture manager, on the condition of the store's parking lot at 2115 S. MacArthur Blvd. "They've even taken over next door at the bowling alley." (Town and Country Lanes eventually had to cordon off some space to guarantee parking for its own customers, Markovich said.)

In fact, the parking lot was so "loaded" that spaces were being gobbled up in the Town and Country shopping center across Outer Park Drive.

Even before the opening-day speeches at 9 a.m., shoppers were gathering behind the audience of government, business and media officials, poised to swoop through the doors. When city and store officials cut the ribbon, the rush was on.

"We ran out of carts within the first hour," Markovich said. "That's 400 carts — that's a lot of carts."

It wasn't two minutes after the opening before Christmas-minded youngsters were surveying the toy displays, wide-eyed shoppers pushing carts were cornering the aisles, and a dozen



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Crowds thronged the new Venture store Monday, and checkout lanes were backed up for a half hour to an hour with customers waiting to pay for their purchases.

or so customers were sitting down to doughnuts at the coffee shop.

And if finding a parking spot and racing into the store seemed difficult, apparently getting out was no easier. A lengthy wait at the checkout counters was the rule of the day.

"Our cashiers are new," Markovich explains, adding gratefully: "And our customers are very patient."

Markovich wasn't expecting the huge crowd either.

"An excellent response," he said. "We're pleasantly surprised."

Columbus Day seemed to be the unaccounted-for factor in the opening day plans.

"I think its being a holiday has a lot

to do with it," Markovich said at 2:30 p.m., as the store struggled under the buying power of state workers, bank employees and others who had a day off Monday.

In a technical vein, one observer suggested it's a sign of pent-up consumer demand. "I'd say this is a good sign of it," agreed Markovich.

The next two weeks, he said, will be "backbusters" for the store's 300-plus employees as local residents satisfy their curiosity and urge to buy. The official grand opening doesn't start until next week, when Venture starts its advertising blitz.

"Things will settle down eventu-

ally," Markovich said confidently. "It's just something new right now."

To help kick off Monday's opening, the Venture Stores company donated \$1,000 to the Springfield United Way campaign.

Venture, a division of the May Department Stores Co., features apparel and shoes, small appliances, radios and TVs, sporting goods and jewelry. There's also a pharmacy and hair salon.

Colonel Day's, a division of Venture, is a jeanswear specialty store. The Colonel Day's in Springfield is attached to the north side of the Venture store.